

Message Text

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ACTION EB-08

INFO OCT-01 ARA-10 ISO-00 CIAE-00 COME-00 DODE-00

DOTE-00 FMC-01 INR-07 NSAE-00 CG-00 DLOS-09

OES-07 AID-05 /048 W

-----042626 021329Z /42

R 012045Z AUG 77

FM AMEMBASSY CARACAS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8604

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E.O. 11652: NA

TAGS: EWWT, VE

SUBJECT: PORT CONGESTION

REF: A) STATE 168548 B) CARACAS A-084 C) CARACAS 1398

1. UNTIL THIS YEAR, RELATIVELY LIGHTER MARITIME TRAFFIC VOLUME DURING THE PERIOD MAY-AUGUST RESULTED IN REDUCED CONGESTION IN VENEZUELA'S PORTS. THIS YEAR, HOWEVER, LA GUAIRA AND PUERTO CABELLO REMAIN BADLY CONGESTED, AND THE OVERALL SITUATION HAS WORSENERED AS CONGESTION HAS SPREAD TO MARACAIBO AND GUANTA.

2. THERE ARE 53 SHIPS IN THE HARBOR AT LA GUAIRA, WITH 41 OF THESE AWAITING BERTH SPACE. THE SITUATION IS ROUGHLY THE SAME AT PUERTO CABELLO WITH 43 VESSELS AWAITING BERTH SPACE. MARACAIBO, FOR

WHICH PORT CONGESTION IS A RECENT PHENOMENON, HAS 19 SHIPS AWAITING FOR FIVE BERTHS. THE RELATIVELY SMALLER PORT AT GUANTA IS ALSO CROWDED. IN TOTAL, 150 VESSELS ARE AWAITING BERTH SPACE IN VENEZUELAN PORTS.

3. RELIEF MEASURES, SUCH AS LIBERALIZING CUSTOMS CLEARANCE PROCEDURES, AND REDRAFTING LABOR LAWS (REF. B), ARE STILL UNDER STUDY FIVE MONTHS AFTER EARLIER PUBLICITY INDICATED
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THAT THESE MEASURES WERE TO BE PROMPTLY ENACTED INTO LAW. OTHER PROPOSALS, SUCH AS ESTABLISHING BONDED STORAGE AREAS OUTSIDE THE MAJOR PORTS, AND THE INSTALLATION OF FLOATING DOCKS HAVE NOT YET BEGUN TO BE IMPLEMENTED. INP (NATIONAL PORTS INSTITUTE) HAS MADE OTHER PROPOSALS THAT APPEAR SOMEWHAT IMPRACTICAL, I.E., DIRECTING ALL INCOMING CARGO TO KINGSTON, JAMAICA, TO BE RELOADED ON LARGER VESSELS SO

THAT THERE WOULD BE FEWER SHIPS IN VENEZUELAN HARBORS.

4. SOME SHIPPING LINES ARE MORE FORTUNATE THAN OTHERS IN BEING ABLE TO MINIMIZE UNLOADING DELAYES WHICH ARE PRESENTLY AVERAGING 3 WEEKS TO A MONTH. CANADIAN VESSELS CARRY NEWSPRINT TO QUALIFY THEM FOR PRIORITY BERTHING. U.S. FLAG LINES HAVE PROBABLY BEEN MOST SUCCESSFUL IN AVOIDING LONG WAITING PERIODS. PRUDENTIAL AND DELTA LINES (GULF COAST) NOW HAVE LASH VESSEL SERVICES TO MARACAIBO, PUERTO CABELLO, AND GUANTA, WHICH ENABLES THEM TO DROP OFF BARGES AT THESE PORTS WITHOUT HAVING TO WAIT FOR PORT SPACE, AND MAKES IT POSSIBLE FOR LASH CARGOES TO BE UNLOADED IN MARGINAL (DRAFT & LENGTH) BERTHS.

5. EMBASSY EXPECTS THAT PORT CONGESTION WILL WORSEN SUBSTANTIALLY IN COMING MONTHS AS PEAK TRAFFIC SEASON (SEPTEMBER-JANUARY) BEGINS. CRITICALLY INCREASED CONGESTION IS LIKELY TO INSPIRE OWNERS OF VENEZUELAN-FLAG VESSELS TO SEEK PREFERENTIAL BERTHING TREATMENT, AS WAS THE CASE LAST YEAR. CAVN, THE NATIONAL FLEET, HAS ALREADY ANNOUNCED THAT IT WILL SHOW A LOSS THIS YEAR (THE FIRST TIME IN ITS HISTORY) DUE TO PORT CONGESTION.
VAKY

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01-Jan-1994 12:00:00 am
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: PORT CONGESTION, CARGO HANDLING, ORGANIZATION & MANAGEMENT
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Sent Date: 01-Aug-1977 12:00:00 am
Decaption Date: 01-Jan-1960 12:00:00 am
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1977CARACA07598
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D770276-0549
Format: TEL
From: CARACAS
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1977/newtext/t197708111/aaaadqyy.tel
Line Count: 83
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 3c6cb350-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION EB
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 77 STATE 168548, 77 CARACAS A-84, 77 CARACAS 1398
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 30-Mar-2005 12:00:00 am
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 1437855
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: PORT CONGESTION
TAGS: EWWT, PGOV, VE
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odhc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/3c6cb350-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
22 May 2009
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009